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ABSTRACT

An educational voucher demonstration program begun in 1972 developed into an experiment in alternative education within a public school framework and served as a springboard for a study of the nature and effectiveness of alternative programs generally. By the time the data gathering was completed in 1977, four middle- to large-sized school districts had been studied and compared: Minneapolis (Minnesota), Cincinnati (Ohio), Eugene (Oregon), and the Alum Rock district of San Jose (California). The results were published in six volumes which this seventh volume summarizes along with a discussion of policy implications. The issues addressed in the six reports were (1) the effect of district policies on implementation of alternatives, (2) how school principals influence the success of alternatives, (3) how alternative programs affect teachers, (4) how families choose among educational alternatives, (5) whether alternatives achieve diversity in the classroom, and (6) how alternatives affect student outcomes. In concluding remarks the study team discusses the advisability of thoroughly evaluating district needs, anticipating difficulties, and adopting procedural formality at the local level when alternatives are implemented. They suggest further that the federal role should consist of financial support for innovation. (Author/PGD)

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ED216427

A STUDY OF ALTERNATIVES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION, VOL. VII: CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

This report is the seventh and final volume of a series documenting a Rand study of alternative schools in American education, sponsored by the National Institute of Education. The other volumes in the series, published under the general title A Study of Alternatives in American Education, are:

Vol. I. District Policies and the Implementation of Change, G. Bass, R-2170/1-NIE.

Vol. II. The Role of the Principal, M. Thomas, R-2170/2-NIE.

Vol. III. Teachers' Responses to Alternatives, R. Rasmussen, R-2170/3-NIE.

Vol. IV. Family Choice in Schooling, R. G. Bridge and J. Blackman, R-2170/4-NIE.

Vol. V. Diversity in the Classroom, P. Barker, T. K. Bikson, and J. Kimbrough, R-2170/5-NIE.

Vol. VI. Student Outcomes at Alum Rock, F. J. Capell, R-2170/6-NIE.

The present volume reviews the findings and presents policy implications of the entire study. It should prove useful to practitioners, community groups, and federal and state policymakers who are interested in educational alternatives. The findings and conclusions of this study, however, reflect events that occurred from 1971 through 1977. A study of subsequent events might produce conclusions different from those presented here.

Predictably, this summary volume reflects the work of many of the members, past and present, of Rand's Education and Human Resources program; hence, the program has been designated as the author of this

volume. Nevertheless, special recognition should go to Bill Furry, Gail Bass, and Joyce Peterson, who contributed greatly to this volume, as did Dan Weiler in serving as project leader throughout the study.

Richard J. Shavelson
Director, Education and
Human Resources Program

CONTENTS

PREFACE iii

Section
I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY 4
Definition and Objectives of Alternatives 4
Alum Rock: The Voucher Demonstration and Beyond 5
The Sites and Their Programs 11
Nature of the Study 17
Limitations of the Study 19

III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS 21
How District Strategies Affect Implementation of Alternatives 22
How School Principals Affect the Success of Alternative Programs 29
How Teachers Respond to Educational Alternatives 34
How Families Choose Educational Alternatives 40
Measuring Diversity in the Classroom 45
How Alternatives Affect Student Outcomes 50

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS 55
Local Policies in the Introduction and Management of Alternatives 55
The Federal Role in Creating Educational Diversity and Choice 73

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, pressure on the schools to achieve various academic, social, and political objectives has created interest in educational alternatives. By offering alternatives to their traditional programs, school districts hope to meet the needs of different school populations and thus improve the quality of education offered to all students. The record of these efforts, however, indicates that educational alternatives are usually difficult to institute and sustain.

Considerable human and financial resources have been invested in these attempts. Before they invest more resources in alternative programs, educators, administrators, and policymakers would be wise to review the lessons gleaned from past efforts. The purpose of this report is to summarize the conclusions and policy implications derived from an extended Rand Corporation study of alternative education programs at four sites. Because of its original focus, the study may be particularly informative for state and federal policymakers interested in voucher experiments.

In spring 1972, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) funded an educational voucher demonstration in Alum Rock, California, and awarded the study and evaluation contract for the demonstration to Rand. For reasons discussed later in this report, it became obvious by the second year that the experiment was more a test of a variant of alternative schools than it was a test of educational vouchers. Also by that time, the National Institute of Education (NIE) had assumed sponsorship of the program. Although the demonstration had not approximated OEO's original

voucher plan, NIE and Rand agreed that the innovative program that had developed merited further study: Issues had emerged in Alum Rock's attempt to implement the voucher program that might yield better understanding of the problems associated with implementing alternative schools generally. Consequently, the project was expanded into a limited comparative study comprising three additional sites where alternative schools were being tried: Cincinnati, Ohio; Eugene, Oregon; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Data collection at these sites and Alum Rock was completed during 1976 and 1977.

In analyzing these data, the research project did not intend to evaluate the districts' policies nor to judge the relative value of particular alternatives or of alternatives and traditional programs. We found that a district must assess for itself how desirable and feasible an alternative is in relation to the local context. What does it want from an alternative, and how hospitable will conditions in the district be to that alternative? Nevertheless, the study implies that regardless of their specific objectives--social equity, accountability, diversity, desegregation--districts will confront a common set of issues. Because they identify and analyze those issues, we believe the Rand reports summarized here can aid these assessments. (See Preface.)

What are the issues? Each of the study's six reports addresses one of them:

- The effect of district policies on implementing alternatives
- How school principals influence the success of alternatives
- How alternative programs affect teachers

- How families choose among educational alternatives
- Whether alternatives achieve diversity in the classroom
- How alternatives affect student outcomes

Section II describes the general background of the study, the sites, and their programs. Section III summarizes the major findings and policy-relevant conclusions of the reports. Section IV identifies and develops the study's implications for federal and local policies affecting alternative programs.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

We believe that the issues generated by alternative programs at the four sites are typical of such programs nationwide. In judging how representative or how relevant for them the study may be, however, readers need to understand the background of the study, the conditions, assumptions, decisions, and data sources that have shaped our conclusions.

DEFINITION AND OBJECTIVES OF ALTERNATIVES

School districts, educators, and policymakers define alternatives in various ways and adopt them for various reasons. For purposes of this study, we defined an alternative as:

> A full-time educational program, available to students on a voluntary basis, that differs distinctly from the majority of programs offered in a district.

An alternative may differ from those programs along several dimensions. A method-oriented alternative uses a particular method of instruction, e.g., open classrooms or continuous progress. A content-oriented alternative offers a special curriculum, e.g., back-to-basics, bilingual, or math-science. In general, method-oriented alternatives attempt basic changes in the approach to teaching, because they affect all segments of a school's program, not merely a particular subject area.

Alternatives may be housed in different ways: multiprogram schools, including mini-schools (several alternative programs sharing a

building) and schools-within-schools (an alternative program housed in a larger host school), or separate-site schools (alternative programs occupying their own buildings).

In many cases, "alternative" implies a distinctive form of management: Parents, teachers, students, and administrators share in making vital curricular, personnel, and financial decisions.

The ultimate goal of alternatives is to improve education. Districts may have additional objectives, however, such as:

- o Desegregation: Offering "magnet" programs--specialized programs attractive enough to motivate parents to send their children to integrated schools outside their neighborhoods.
- o Accountability and constituency satisfaction: Making schools directly responsive to parent and student needs and more open in their educational operations, thereby increasing student, parent, and staff satisfaction with the educational system.
- o Diversity: Introducing varied educational programs to meet the needs of a socially and ethnically diverse student clientele.
- o Freedom of choice: Giving all parents the right to choose the educational alternatives they consider most appropriate for their children.

ALUM ROCK: THE VOUCHER DEMONSTRATION AND BEYOND

The issue of parental choice in education contributed centrally to the growing interest in voucher systems during the 1960s and 1970s. Under a voucher system, parents are given vouchers representing their childrens' fair share of public education funds. They use these

vouchers to "purchase" education at the public or private schools of their choice, and the schools redeem the vouchers to claim those public funds. By making the funds follow the child, voucher systems are intended to introduce free market incentives into the public schools' virtual monopoly of elementary and secondary education. Vouchers would give private schools access to tax dollars and, in theory, encourage them to offer programs that compete with the public schools. Threatened with the loss of tax dollars, the public schools would, theoretically, have new incentives to improve and diversify their programs to compete with the private schools and each other for students and their vouchers.

Voucher proponents claim that this competition would:

- Promote educational innovation and diversity,
- Make schools responsive to students' and parents' needs,
- Increase parental involvement and satisfaction with education, and
- Provide low income minority families with the same access and choice for private schools that is now only afforded by families of some means.

The end result would be measurable improvement in academic achievement, especially of disadvantaged students.

Those who oppose vouchers--most public-school teachers' and educators' organizations are among them--claim that vouchers could have a pernicious effect on education. They might:

- o Exacerbate race and class segregation,
- o Encourage unprofessional competition among schools,
- o Break down the Constitutional separation of church and state,
- o Undermine the system of professional certification and tenure for teachers and administrators,
- o Threaten the shared democratic values fostered by the traditional public school system, and
- o Compromise the role of the state in ensuring that certain minimum standards are met.

The OEO, Alum Rock, and Rand

Despite these negative arguments, OEO became interested in vouchers in the 1960s, primarily as a means of improving the education of the poor. In 1971, impressed by the possibilities of a "regulated compensatory" voucher system designed by The Center for the Study of Public Policy (in Cambridge, Massachusetts), OEO authorized voucher feasibility studies in four districts, Alum Rock among them. (Eventually four additional districts were given feasibility grants but more chose to seek implementation grants.) The other three districts eventually chose not to participate in a voucher demonstration, but Alum Rock finally agreed to launch a voucher program. At that time, however, California law would not permit private schools to participate in such a demonstration. Considering that Alum Rock was its only available site, OEO agreed to accept a public-schools-only, "transition model" there, with the understanding that the district would move toward a "purer" model as the demonstration progressed.

Prior to the demonstration, community involvement with the schools had been feeble in Alum Rock, and there was little political mobilization or pressure for social change. Turnout at school elections was light, and most parents expressed satisfaction with the education their children were receiving. There was virtually no pressure to reform or diversify the schools.

Why, then, was Alum Rock the only district that overcame the trepidations other districts felt about a voucher demonstration? A large part of the answer lies with the superintendent. He saw a voucher demonstration as an opportunity to advance existing policies of administrative decentralization and parent participation, while bringing substantial federal funds into his financially hard-pressed district. Rather than champion the voucher demonstration on its philosophical merits, he presented its fiscal, organizational, and innovative advantages.

He also proved adept at finding compromises to overcome the reservations of various groups. However, those compromises defused most of the competitive effects of a voucher system and led the demonstration far from the paradigm originally envisioned by OEO.

Parents wanted to guarantee their childrens' right to attend neighborhood schools. Teachers did not want their jobs to depend on the success of their programs. Principals and administrators did not want a popularity contest among public schools, much less between public and private schools. As a result, students were guaranteed a place in their neighborhood schools. Teachers were guaranteed employment regardless of the fate of their programs, although not necessarily in the program of

their choice. And private and parochial schools did not participate in the demonstration even though California eventually passed enabling legislation permitting their participation.

Despite these compromises, only 6 of the district's 24 schools initially agreed to participate in the demonstration. The six, all similar in curriculum and method, certainly did not promise much in the way of competitive diversity. As a result, OEO and the district developed a "mini-school" plan in which each voucher school would offer at least three different programs for parents to choose from. Teachers with similar ideas and interests cooperated to create mini-schools that differed from each other in curriculum or instructional method. Since the spectrum of mini-school programs at each site was roughly the same, competition among schools was greatly reduced, and most parents found an acceptable range of choice within their neighborhood schools. Twenty percent of the children who participated in the demonstration went outside their neighborhoods.

The district distributed the "basic voucher" funds in a manner fundamentally inconsistent with economic competition. Individual mini-schools could not raise or lower their staff salaries, and the total pool of funds for basic vouchers exactly equalled the amount necessary to pay all school-personnel salaries. Consequently, the district required low-cost mini-schools (whose younger, less experienced teachers had lower salaries) to return some of their voucher income to the district so that high-cost mini-schools could pay their high-salaried teachers. This procedure eliminated most of the financial incentive for mini-schools to attract additional students.

Without salary incentives, other considerations made those mini-schools unwilling to meet any enrollment demand beyond their original limits. Thus, programs that might not have survived in a truly competitive situation stayed alive with the overflow from the more popular mini-schools. In spite of some degree of protection, mini-school programs periodically vanished and new programs were implemented.

OEO accepted this model as a transition toward a purer voucher demonstration, but by the end of the second year, it was evident that transition to a full-scale model would not take place. The total of mini-schools had doubled (largely because the number of participating schools had doubled), but this increase represented a quantitative change and not a qualitative one. By this time, the National Institute of Education (NIE) had taken over sponsorship of the program. NIE agreed with the Rand team that although the existing demonstration was not really testing a voucher system, it was of interest in its own right. The mini-schools did offer parents educational options for their children. Alum Rock was, in effect, testing a variant of an innovation that many believed could improve the quality of public education--alternative schools.

Recognition of this difference led to a widening of the research project. While the study continued to focus on Alum Rock during 1974 and 1975, a supplementary study explored the alternative-schools movement in other districts. This study identified a number of issues associated with implementing alternative schools, many of which had already emerged in Alum Rock. When it became obvious by the fourth year that opportunities for a more comprehensive test of the voucher model

were unlikely to develop (at Alum Rock or elsewhere), Rand and NIE decided to use the work accomplished in Alum Rock as the base for a comparative study of alternative schools. This study included three new sites where alternative schools were being tried: Cincinnati, Ohio; Eugene, Oregon; and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

THE SITES AND THEIR PROGRAMS

The criteria used to select these sites guaranteed that they had a major commitment to alternatives, offered variation in size and demographic characteristics. In addition to satisfying these criteria as well as or better than any other combination of districts, Cincinnati, Eugene, and Minneapolis allowed some important comparisons. Among these were their reasons for initiating alternatives, their sources of funding, and the types of alternatives they attempted.

Alum Rock

At the time of the study, Alum Rock was a racially mixed, relatively poor, suburban district of San Jose, California. In spite of a high transiency rate and a decline in Alum Rock's school population, the schools remained relatively well balanced racially and ethnically. However, most of the residents were lower-middle or lower class; many had little formal education and worked at unskilled or semiskilled jobs. In 1972, more than a third of the families qualified for welfare, and three-fourths of the students qualified for subsidized lunch programs.

The school district's financial situation reflected this poverty. At the start of the voucher demonstration, Alum Rock had one of the

lowest assessed valuations per student for California districts of its size. Consequently, over half of the district's operating revenues came from the state, a percentage well above the average for the state's districts at that time. Despite the district's financial difficulties, most parents expressed satisfaction with the schools and the education their children were receiving. Thus, neither desegregation nor dissatisfaction with the existing program provided the impetus for an alternative program.

As we noted above, the motivation was largely financial. For the superintendent, a federally funded demonstration meant more money for his financially troubled district and the possibility of advancing his policies of administrative decentralization and parent participation in the schools. For Alum Rock, the voucher demonstration presented the opportunity for educational innovation, whereas previously the district had been barely able to maintain a conventional program. By advancing decentralization, the demonstration promised to upgrade the status of principals and teachers as professional decisionmakers. By creating competitive alternatives, the voucher system promised to make the schools more responsive to Alum Rock's students and parents. With federal funds, the district established the system of mini-schools described in the previous section. These mini-schools reflected the interests of the teachers who proposed and developed them. Some were based on innovative instructional methods, others on alternative subject matter.

Cincinnati

At the time of the study, Cincinnati had many of the problems besetting older industrial cities: increasing costs for urban services, a declining tax base, and migration of middle-class families to the suburbs. School enrollment figures mirrored this population shift. The Cincinnati School District's overall enrollment had declined in recent years, but the proportion of black students had increased. Cincinnati's neighborhoods, like those of many older cities, are clearly identifiable by race, ethnicity, and social class. Before 1973, children were assigned to all but one of the city's schools according to street address. In other words, the schools reflected and reinforced neighborhood segregation. Integrating the schools was the primary motivation for alternatives in Cincinnati.

Early in 1973, the Cincinnati Board of Education adopted as its highest policy goal "quality integrated education." Through an open-enrollment plan, it hoped to achieve racial balance in the schools. By establishing alternative schools, it hoped to encourage middle-class families to remain in the city, as well as bring about desegregation.

The open-enrollment plan was subsequently stymied by the new school board elected in November 1973. Four of its new members had run on a neighborhood-schools platform. When the new board failed to implement its predecessor's open-enrollment resolution, the NAACP filed a suit charging it with racial and economic segregation. Although it had foiled the open-enrollment plan, the board used its pursuit of voluntary integration through the alternative schools as part of its defense strategy.

As in Alum Rock, some of the alternative schools were method-oriented and some content-oriented. All occupied separate sites and, with the exception of a few magnet schools, had no local attendance areas. Although some of the first schools were developed from projects that had been started with federal funds, Cincinnati's alternative program relied on local resources for support. Indeed, after the failure to implement the open-enrollment resolution, the new board allocated substantial extra funds to expand the voluntary-integration, alternatives program for the 1975-1976 school year.

Eugene

Of the four sites studied, only Eugene, Oregon, seems to have had purely educational reasons for instituting alternatives. Eugene had a population of more than 95,000, 15 percent of whom were students at the University of Oregon. The university's presence can also be felt in the city's generally liberal attitude toward political and social issues. Most of Eugene's population is white and middle-class. There is a strong tradition of public participation in government and a tradition of educational progressiveness. Students in most of Eugene's schools perform at or above the national average on achievement tests. In short, Oregon School District 4J, which serves Eugene, has not experienced the social, political, or financial problems that have motivated alternatives in other districts.

Some educational reforms had been instituted in the 1960s. But when the superintendent of 14 years retired in 1973, many people in District 4J voiced their belief that the schools had become rigid and

stagnant. The opinion expressed at public meetings was that the schools should offer more "humanistic" and "open" education and hire a superintendent who could spark new life in the system.

Although the new superintendent's initiation of alternatives raised some controversy, by and large he found the community (not merely the segment pushing for more humanistic education) receptive to the idea. Several factors may explain this receptiveness: the city's liberal atmosphere, its history of educational innovation, and an existing open-enrollment policy that allowed students to transfer to any school in the district that had space available. Hence, in Eugene, choice already existed; the idea was to encourage diversity.

Despite its essentially liberal atmosphere, Eugene also has a tradition of financial conservatism. To forestall opposition from people who feared that the innovations would cost the district too much, the superintendent set a policy that the costs of an alternative could not exceed those of regular schools. When an alternative school proposal was accepted by the board, the school's expenses would be covered by the funds that followed students from their regular schools to the alternative school.

By 1978, the district had established nine alternative programs with less than 1000 students. Most of these programs were method-oriented: They attempted to create more open classroom structure and increase opportunities for self-directed learning. The small size of Eugene's alternatives program suggests that it has best served the vocal minority who expressed a desire for change. Evidently, dissatisfaction with the regular schools was not widespread.

Minneapolis

At the time of the study, Minneapolis had a population of 400,000, and was plagued by the ills that trouble most older cities. In the mid-1960s, the city began a period of educational reform. Centrally controlled under a conservative superintendent for almost 20 years, the schools suffered from the usual problems of older urban districts: declining enrollment, declining test scores, inadequate finances and facilities, and inadequate preparation to deal with the educational needs of its growing minority population. In 1964, a new reform-minded majority gained control of the Minneapolis School Board, whose five priority goals were basic skills instruction, decentralization, educational alternatives, integration, and staff development.

Although the board's official policy included educational alternatives, consumer demand provided the original impetus for alternatives, as had happened in Eugene. In the southeastern section of the district, sparked by parents in university neighborhoods, the community had begun to campaign for open classrooms in its schools. In 1971, the United States Office of Education funded a five-year Experimental Schools project, Southeast Alternatives (SEA), to create educational choice in this small section of the district.

Near the end of SEA's first year, a federal court ordered Minneapolis to desegregate its schools. The court accepted, slightly revised, a desegregation/integration resolution the board had passed prior to the order. The plan involved pairing or clustering schools to create larger, racially balanced attendance areas. The superintendent and his aides saw the extension of the SEA alternatives as a means of

making the court-ordered desegregation more agreeable to parents. Having their children bused to a school they had chosen for its educational program would, ideally, be less odious than having them bused simply to create a racial mix decreed by the court. In addition to serving integration, the alternatives program itself was widely viewed in Minneapolis as an aspect of high-quality educational opportunity.

In March 1973, the board agreed to begin the feasibility studies and planning needed to implement a citywide program of educational alternatives in grades K-6. Unlike the pilot SEA project, this citywide program was funded by the Minneapolis School District. Also unlike the pilot project, the citywide alternatives were primarily motivated by the need to facilitate desegregation, not by consumer demand. Nevertheless, the SEA project's apparent success provided the underlying motive for using alternatives to address the integration problems.

The SEA project provided the three method-oriented models (contemporary, continuous progress, and open) for the extended program, even though the board had not stipulated that they should. All three models taught basic skills but their structure and methods differed.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

Research Approach

At the time that Rand expanded its study of educational alternatives beyond Alum Rock, what little research had been done suggested the need for an exploratory, comparative study of alternatives

at other sites. This comparative approach was expected to reveal the common challenges districts face when they initiate a policy of offering alternatives. It would also allow analysis of how districts dealt with these common challenges in their different situations, and with what results. (Specific details of the research design can be found in the six reports.)

Data Source and Collection

Because of the way that it developed, the project has much more comprehensive data and analysis for Alum Rock than for the other sites. Rand researchers followed the Alum Rock demonstration for over five years, conducting parent and teacher surveys, interviewing community leaders, district administrators, and teachers, observing classrooms and staff and community meetings, analyzing students' cognitive and attitudinal tests, and collecting budgetary data and other documentary material.

At the other sites, data collection consisted mostly of short-term fieldwork. Two Rand staff members spent three weeks each in Cincinnati, Eugene, and Minneapolis, primarily visiting alternative programs. They conducted interviews, observed alternative and regular schools and programs, and collected available documents and research materials in each district. In Eugene and Minneapolis, the staff obtained permission to conduct a survey of teachers in alternative and regular schools, which corresponded to the spring 1977 Alum Rock survey. The surveys provided data for all of the reports summarized in Section III.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

We consider this study exploratory. It draws no conclusions about the relative desirability of alternatives. As we said in the introduction, that is a value judgment that citizens, professionals, and policymakers must make on the basis of what they want from their schools.

The study utilizes a sample that is very small and was selected to include only districts that had made significant efforts to implement alternatives. For these reasons, it would be inappropriate to make sweeping generalizations from its findings.[1] Nevertheless, we have several reasons for believing that many of those findings will be more widely applicable than the sample size might predict. First, the findings are, in many respects, consistent across sites and among observers and data collection methods. Second, institutional arrangements and operating procedures are similar in school districts across the country.[2] Third, review of the literature on alternatives indicates that the implementation problems encountered in the four sample districts are typical of the alternatives movement nationally. What we learned about alternatives appears generally consistent with the results of other recent research on educational innovation. Still,

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[1] The six study reports summarized in the following pages differ greatly in the reliability and generalizability of their findings on alternatives. These limitations are discussed in each report.

[2] Among the most important features shared by most public school systems are multiple school sites, multiple income sources, multiple mandates and goals, Board of Trustees-Central Administration and Support-School form of organization, functional specialization, fund accounting, certificated and classified employee categories, salary schedules based on years of service and academic credits, employee unions and associations, balanced budget requirements, price inflation, and fluctuating enrollment.

readers should always keep in mind the limited and selective nature of the sample, especially if they are considering how advisable or feasible alternatives would be for a particular community.

III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Alum Rock, rapid and complex changes in organization and procedures raised many questions about the problems a district might encounter in implementing educational alternatives. When Rand extended the study beyond Alum Rock, the purpose was to discover whether other districts encountered similar problems in trying some version of an alternative schools program. If so, what lessons might be learned from these analogous experiences? The research reported in the preceding six volumes of the series focused on these questions:

- What district strategies are most likely to lead to the successful implementation of alternatives under different circumstances?
- What role does--or should--the school principal play?
- What effects of an alternative system are most significant to teachers? Do district policies governing alternatives influence teachers' perceptions and attitudes?
- How do parents react--do they understand their choices? If so, how do they exercise their options?
- Is real diversity possible within the public schools, with the many internal and external pressures to conform to a common program?
- How do students fare in alternative schools in terms of both cognitive and noncognitive growth?

This section summarizes the findings these questions generated. Our discussion of classroom diversity and student outcomes relies entirely on data collected in Alum Rock during the third and fourth years of the demonstration; our discussion of family choice relies principally on Alum Rock data, with coordination of research from the Minneapolis sites. With respect to implementation of alternatives, and the importance of principals and teachers to the success of alternatives, a caveat is in order. While we present data from all four sites, the data available from Alum Rock far outweigh those collected in the other three sites. This fact should be borne in mind in evaluating the findings.

HOW DISTRICT STRATEGIES AFFECT IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVES

As we saw in Section II, districts have different reasons for initiating alternatives and develop different kinds of programs. Despite these differences, they face common challenges in implementing programs. The strategies they use to meet these challenges affect their chances of successfully establishing alternatives and making them a stable part of district operations. The experience of the four sites in our study indicates that those strategies should vary according to the functions alternatives serve in a district. Whatever those functions and strategies, however, district officials must play an active and supportive role during implementation--if alternatives are to survive in the long run.[1]

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[1] The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume I of the series; see the Preface for complete listing.

In both kind and degree, district-level support during implementation varied markedly among the sites. Policies reflected the districts' motivations for adopting alternatives and shaped the path implementation would take.

Alum Rock's motivation for participating in the voucher demonstration had been to further decentralization and parent participation and bring federal money into a financially strapped district. Consistent with that motivation, and the competitive nature of a voucher system, district officials left the development of programs to principals and teachers. While providing staff development for principals regarding innovation and changes, it made no provision for central review or approval of the programs, offered no direct help in developing curricula, assumed no responsibility for training teachers in new educational techniques or approaches, and provided no help in managing the mini-schools. In short, the district provided little direct support to the teachers who were trying to manage programs and implement educational change in the classroom.

There had been no strong or consistent community pressure for educational change in Alum Rock, and the district's lack of direction and support for change undermined the teachers' and principals' commitment to the alternative programs. Even before the end of federal funding, most of Alum Rock's teachers considered the mini-school experiment, especially the task of running as well as teaching in a mini-school, unsuccessful, and our research indicates that there was very little systematic diversity among their offerings.

Although financial problems initially figured in Cincinnati's decision to establish a system of alternative programs, desegregation became the primary, and urgent, motivation for initiating alternative schools. With an eye on racial balance, the central administration designed the different alternatives and designated their locations. However, the pressure to expand alternatives subsequently diverted the central administration's attention from their implementation problems.

Each program was assigned to a high-level central administrator for overall supervision of start-up and implementation. Thus, support for a program during implementation depended on the commitment and skill of that administrator. The district also assigned a program coordinator to about half of its first programs. They assumed responsibility for program leadership, curricular development, and guiding staff selection and student recruitment. However, the remaining alternatives had no assigned coordinator. Some of these experienced problems with overall planning, coordination, and curriculum development.

The district had no mechanism for providing additional support to correct these problems. Indeed, pressure to expand encouraged a tendency to reduce funds for planning and development for established programs. This tendency could have undermined those programs that have offered especially distinctive educational choices: Those programs usually have extra staffing, curriculum development, and public relations requirements.

District support of alternatives in Eugene was mixed. This uneven support probably reflects the original impetus for alternatives: a proportionately small group of parents and school staff who requested

them. Proposals for alternatives were developed by interested groups of staff and/or parents, but had to have approval from the district administration and school board. The superintendent supported alternatives, but his commitment that they would cost no more than regular schools placed a serious restriction on district support for implementation. A special-projects assistant was hired to provide administrative liaison and advocacy for alternative programs. The district has also allowed them flexibility in some areas, such as staffing, that help maintain their distinct styles. However, the district has provided very few resources for staff development and planning.

Despite this limited financial support, alternative programs have become an institution in Eugene. The elementary alternatives seem clearly different from the educational programs offered by the regular schools, but there appears to be a slight drift back to conventional practice in several programs. This may be explained in part by the district's failure to support staff development. It may also be explained by the fact that the district has developed few formal policies (e.g., monitoring, evaluation) regarding the alternatives programs. Their limited size has allowed the district to handle them largely on an ad hoc basis, with few changes in overall district policy. While this has allowed flexible, informal district support of the programs, it may leave them vulnerable to turnover in administration and program personnel.

In sum, the district has not provided active leadership in implementing alternatives nor sought to expand their influence to other

schools. Without such support, Eugene's alternatives will probably remain limited in size, catering to the small constituency interested in them.

In Minneapolis, as in Eugene, consumer demand provided the original impetus for alternatives, but the decision to use alternatives to aid desegregation required the district to play a more active role. The decision to offer alternatives was centrally mandated, but actual design and planning of programs became the responsibility of local staffs and communities. However, the district provided strong support.

Without decreeing that the pilot SEA programs be emulated by other schools, it used SEA's example to establish an informal consensus about how elementary alternatives would be defined in Minneapolis. By thus limiting the range of choices to be offered, the district simplified the task of parent education, helped create a sense of common purpose, and assisted the decentralized planning process by establishing common expectations about its design and participants. Having chosen alternatives that required substantial changes in school organization and teaching style, the district invested heavily in staff development. It also adapted many of its administrative functions such as personnel placement and grade-based testing to accommodate the needs of diverse programs.

Minneapolis seems to have succeeded in offering genuine educational choices at the elementary level. In response to community demand, it has widened the range of elementary choices by establishing several "fundamentals schools" in addition to three SEA-developed models. As of 1977, when we completed our data collection, all areas in the district

appeared to be supporting their existing programs, and three of them were moving to involve all their schools in alternatives.

What do these findings imply about the effects of district strategies on implementing and sustaining alternatives?

At the completion of our study, federal funding of the voucher demonstration had ceased; Alum Rock was the only school district that had dropped formal support of its system of alternatives even though vestiges of alternatives still existed (e.g., open enrollment). One possible implication is that where there is no community demand or federal support for alternative schools--and alternatives do not serve a pressing political goal like desegregation--they are unlikely to survive. Although district strategies and cessation of federal funding contributed to the demise of the mini-schools, the roots of failure go back to the fact that the district and the community were never committed to educational alternatives per se. Alum Rock pursued other objectives through the model, providing no support that might have strengthened the educational alternatives, although they provided supporting activities (e.g., counseling) for parental decisionmaking.

At each of the other three sites, alternatives received support from administrators, teachers, and parents. In each case, the district's official policy is to continue them. Even if there is a commitment to educational or some other kind of change and even if a district seems to have established viable alternatives, we have seen evidence of the potential vulnerability of alternative programs. In Eugene and Minneapolis, where alternatives are largely method-oriented, a drift toward a single model could be observed. In Cincinnati, where

the distinctiveness of alternatives depended more on small class size, development of new curricula, and services of special support staff, the tendency to cut back funds once a program is established may cause its unique features to deteriorate and fade with time.

Evidently, the potential for alternatives to lose their distinctiveness is general. Based on these cases (and others in the literature), it appears that the district's strategies and support can make a vital difference. The most important contribution the district can make is to support staff training in the philosophy and practice of a particular method, assist curricular development, and adapt district operations and policies to accommodate the special needs of distinctive programs. Above all, the district must assume final responsibility for sustaining a system of educational choice, rather than leave it up to individual programs.

Eugene, Cincinnati, and Minneapolis differed sharply in that regard. Eugene's alternatives have remained essentially marginal to overall district operations. Teachers must develop their own programs and recruit their own students. The small size of programs, lack of clear district policy, and limited resources make them especially vulnerable to turnover in district and school staff. Cincinnati allowed responsibility for sustaining alternatives to fall on the programs more by default than intention. Faced with the demands of establishing new programs, it has not had the financial or other resources to attend to the implementation problems of existing alternatives. The district has not so much failed to support alternatives; it has simply not had enough support to go around. Because of the scope of its alternatives effort,

Minneapolis is more comparable to Cincinnati than to Eugene. Minneapolis has adapted district operations to accommodate distinct programs. Despite budget cuts, it has managed to maintain extra funds to pay for staff development. It has also continued to inform parents of their educational options rather than leave recruitment up to the programs.

In deciding on strategies, it makes a great deal of difference whether a district sets out to implement a few alternatives to satisfy a small group of parents, students, and staff; to accomplish overall reform by converting to a district-wide system of alternatives; or to desegregate schools by offering educational options. However, this differentiation among types of alternatives should not obscure their major common requirement for successful implementation: informed, consistent, visible, and unflagging district support.

We believe that districts might find the discussions of issues that follow helpful in creating informed policies and strategies.

HOW SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AFFECT THE SUCCESS OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

In selecting principals to manage alternative programs, districts usually base their choice on the candidates' support of district objectives in initiating educational alternatives. They have not systematically considered how effective different kinds of leaders are in different kinds of alternative school settings. Consequently, they have often chosen principals whose styles were (sometimes disastrously) inappropriate to the settings in which they found themselves. Findings at our four sites indicate that the success of alternative programs

depends in large part on the style of leadership a principal exercises.[2]

Our study of the principal's role focused primarily on one aspect of that style: willingness to share decisionmaking authority with teachers. For purposes of organizing and analyzing data collected at the four sites, the research team identified three behavioral types: Directors, Administrators, and Facilitators:

- Directors make all decisions, both procedural (e.g., budgeting, scheduling, hiring) and substantive (e.g., curriculum, teaching techniques, training). They may consult teachers about decisions affecting the classroom, but they retain final authority.
- Administrators separate procedural from substantive decisions, allowing teachers to make the decisions about what and how they teach, but retaining responsibility for decisions that affect the school as a whole.
- Facilitators involve teachers in all types of school decisions. For them, the principal's function is to support teachers in performing their duties, and they are more concerned with social process than with formal organizational procedures.

Even in a district that has no alternative programs, other differences among schools guarantee that no one management style will be universally effective. In a system of alternatives, program

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[2] The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume II of the series; see the Preface for complete listing.

organization largely determines which leadership style is most appropriate. For the principal, multiprogram schools and separate-site programs present different challenges. In both situations, the principal must work to ensure that the programs maintain their distinctiveness. At a multiprogram school this challenge is often compounded by tension among programs.

The evidence indicates that an alternative has a better chance of maintaining a distinctive educational program if established at a separate site rather than at a multiprogram school. Nevertheless, multiprogram schools have been an important, distinguishing feature of alternative school systems. In Minneapolis 21 percent, in Cincinnati 81 percent, and in Alum Rock and Eugene, 100 percent of the elementary alternative programs were in multiprogram schools. Further, certain financial, political, and social constraints make it likely that school districts interested in alternative programs will continue to use multiprogram schools.

What are the conditions that make multiprogram schools difficult to manage? Host schools and communities often feel that alternative programs have been thrust upon them. Programs occupying the same site necessarily compete for use of common resources and facilities (e.g., gym teachers, cafeterias); they generally compete for funds; and they almost always compete for students. This competition, differences in educational philosophy and practice, and different standards for student behavior can, and often do, give rise to considerable tension at multiprogram schools. Tension will be reduced if the programs begin to lose their distinctiveness and become more alike. That drift, of

course, threatens the integrity of an alternative program and is one of the things management must guard against.

Separate-site programs do not have that kind of tension to deal with, but they, too, have their vulnerablilities. Without some mechanism to ensure that classroom practices accord with the philosophy underlying the alternative, teachers within the same school may begin to go their separate educational ways. This divergence threatens the integrity of a separate-site program as much as convergence threatens the integrity of alternatives in multiprogram schools.

Our research findings indicate that multiprogram schools with directive, authoritarian principals tended to have greater tension and less program distinctiveness than those with principals who were willing to share decisionmaking with teachers. Prior familiarity with one type of program often made directors seem to favor that program. Even where this was not true, prinicipals' substantive and procedural decisions were influenced by the curricula or teaching methods they were most familiar with. Thus, those decisions often resulted in bringing the programs closer together. Authoritarian principals who could not or would not change their leadership styles tended to leave the multiprogram site whenever possible. In Alum Rock, they were, in several cases, responsible for deciding that their schools returned to offering a single program.

Teachers in multiprogram schools that rated their principals as administrators or facilitators tended to have less tension and more program diversity. In those schools, the principals had taken positive actions to ease tension and competition. One of the most important ways

of easing tension and ensuring program integrity was allowing the teachers to make the substantive decisions about their programs.

All this is not to imply that a directive principal will not be effective in any alternative education school. Evidence from the four sites indicates that at separate-site programs a highly directive principal may be the main reason why an alternative adheres closely to a distinct educational philosophy. In Minneapolis, the separate-site alternatives managed by primarily directive principals were consistent with their labels and distinct from the offerings at other schools. It appears that by exercising strong leadership in curriculum and classroom practices, directive principals can create and sustain a program that is more distinctive than it might otherwise be.

However, the element of most importance here is strong substantive leadership. The effectiveness of some authoritarian principals should not obscure that fact or lead to the conclusion that no other style is effective. In Minneapolis, separate-site programs managed by facilitators also had distinctive programs. The data suggest that as long as the principal (or the district) makes sure the program has strong substantive leadership, a separate-site alternative program has a good chance of maintaining its integrity. This leadership may be provided by a program coordinator, head teacher, or even a committee of teachers and parents.

When a district decides to initiate a system of alternatives, it must work primarily with the principals it has. Since it appears that not all principals have the management styles that render them effective at the different sites, some districts have attempted to train their

principals in leadership suitable to the sites they will manage. Interviews and teacher surveys indicate that this kind of training can help principals to improve their management of multiprogram schools.

The study provides one final insight that may help districts ensure more effective leadership for alternative programs: The incentives to participate should be compatible with the kind of leadership they need to encourage. For example, Alum Rock encouraged its prinicipals to participate by appealing to their desire for more decisionmaking power. Ironically, the multiprogram schools they had to manage needed principals who were wiiling to have less decisionmaking power. Thus, they found the schools especially hard to manage. Their subsequent decisions to disassociate the alternative system contributed to the system's demise.

HOW TEACHERS RESPOND TO EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

Regardless of its motivations or the nature and scope of the program, a district cannot offer clear and consistent educational choices if teachers do not convert plans into classroom practice. Teachers' support of an innovation depends on their evaluation of a program's effects. That evaluation, in turn, is apparently strongly influenced by certain widely held attitudes that teachers bring to their jobs. Nevertheless, teachers in different districts have responded differently to the same kinds of alternative programs. Our study indicates that a district's implementation strategies can make the

difference between negative and positive teacher response to the same alternative.[3]

Considering how crucial the teachers' response is to a program's success, our study attempted to answer two basic questions:

- Which effects of alternative programs are most significant to teachers?
- How do a district's implementation policies affect the ways teachers respond to alternatives?

Prior research indicates that certain attitudes teachers have toward their profession influence how they will respond to alternative programs.[4] They tend to evaluate programs on the basis of their effects primarily on students and secondarily on their parents.

Teachers are also concerned with and judge programs by their effects on working conditions. Past research has shown that they consider the following conditions to be most important:

(1) Personal control over their working environment. This includes choosing the kind of school or program they teach in, participating in school- and program-level decisionmaking, and being free to resist outside influences and pressure on their classrooms.

(2) Workload. Teaching is an open-ended job that tends to become all-consuming. But salaries, promotions, and other rewards do not generally reflect how hard a teacher works. Thus, teachers

[3] The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume III of the series; see the Preface for a complete listing.

[4] This literature is discussed in Volume III of the series.

want to be able to set limits on the nature and magnitude of their workloads.

(3) Peer relationships. Teachers place high value on positive, noncompetitive, peer relationships.

(4) Resource distribution. The concern for fair allocation of district resources extends beyond salaries to include such things as class size, funds for teaching aids, and equal time with district resource people.

Survey data from our study were consistent with the results of past research. In our evaluation of the effects of alternatives, teachers cited effects on students and parents, and effects on their working conditions.

In citing the main advantages of alternatives in their own words, most teachers mentioned advantages to parents, students, or both. The most-mentioned advantage for parents was the availability of choice per se. However, teachers' answers to fixed-choice questions suggested that they were more concerned about the effects on students than on parents. Although few teachers saw alternatives as having disadvantages for parents, a substantial minority had reservations about their advantages for students. The data reveal deep skepticism among teachers that parents would or could make good educational choices for their children. Many teachers expressed concern that alternatives did not provide students with enough training in basic skills. Others felt that alternatives undermined the continuity of the curriculum.

A substantial number also saw advantages to teachers as among the main advantages of alternatives. The most mentioned advantages were the

opportunity to choose among programs with different philosophies, increased influence over educational decisions, and the extra resources that often accompanied alternative programs. In some districts, however, teachers mentioned lack of control over the program in which they taught and unfair distribution of resources among programs as disadvantages. The most often cited disadvantages for teachers were increased workload and increased feelings of competition among teachers.

Although these perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages for parents, students, and teachers were common themes in all the districts we studied, there were some significant differences among districts on particular points. Our study of these differences led to some tentative conclusions about the relationship between district policies and teacher response.

(1) Teachers are more likely to give continuing support to alternatives if they do not bear total responsibility for program development and management. Many teachers found the opportunity to have more influence over educational and other school-level decisions attractive. Nevertheless, the increased workload and the peer-group tensions generated by the multiprogram-school organization proved to be significant drawbacks.

Of the districts we studied, Alum Rock and Eugene gave teachers primary responsibility for program formation and management and housed alternatives in multiprogram schools. Minneapolis and Cincinnati gave those responsibilities to principals or program coordinators and housed alternatives in both separate sites and multiprogram schools. The rates of complaint about teacher workload were highest in Alum Rock and Eugene

and lowest in Minneapolis. Complaints about peer-group tension associated with teacher control were highest in Alum Rock and in the multiprogram schools in Minneapolis. At both sites, more than 50 percent of the multiprogram-school teachers said they would prefer to teach in single-program schools, primarily because of the tension among programs. Teachers in Eugene did not see tension as so much of a problem because the rules governing supply and demand there helped avoid competition.

(2) Teachers are more likely to support alternatives if district policies governing student admissions and transfers are not radically consumer-oriented. Although consumer choice is one of the fundamental arguments for alternatives, districts have considerable latitude in defining the limits of that choice. Our evidence suggests that the more consumer-oriented a program is, the more disadvantages teachers will perceive in that program.

Teachers had various reasons for preferring less consumer-oriented programs. Some did not want parents to "control" admissions and transfers because of their skepticism about the quality of parents' choices. Some felt that this parent control might create program patterns that would force them to teach in programs or locations they did not prefer. Other teachers disliked the idea of demand-controlled admissions and transfers because it would arouse tension among programs and therefore impair teacher-peer relations. Finally, some teachers wanted enrollments in popular programs limited because they believed that continued expansion would draw resources away from their own schools and programs.

(3) Districts must provide some financial support for alternative program development, staff development, and program management if they want to attract and retain good alternative teachers. Subsidies can generate their own political problems within the district (as we shall see below). Nevertheless, our evidence indicates that without subsidies, programs create conditions that affect teachers negatively.

The kind of subsidy alternative teachers need most, if they are to continue supporting alternatives, is one that relieves them of at least some responsibility for developing and managing programs. As we saw above, Alum Rock and Eugene were the two districts that gave teachers primary responsibility for these functions and the two districts where teachers registered the greatest complaints about workload. Eugene is also the one district in which district policy dictated that alternative programs must cost no more than the other programs in the district. Minneapolis and Cincinnati, on the other hand, provided subsidies to assist teachers in program development and management. By the end of our field work, Alum Rock's system of alternatives had disbanded and Eugene's had remained small. Although the reasons for both these results are complex, failure to lighten teachers' workloads cannot be discounted as one of them.

(4) Most teachers in regular programs will accept a district policy of moderate support, of the kinds just discussed, for alternative programs. Predictably, the greater the disparity in district support between alternative and regular schools, the more regular teachers are likely to question district policies. Nevertheless, our evidence suggests that they will recognize the alternatives' legitimate needs for

curriculum development, in-service training, and program management resources--except in districts in the most desperate financial straits.

Although our findings are based on data from only four sites, many of them are consistent with other educational research. Among these are:

- Teachers' skepticism about parents' ability to make good program choices for their children;
- Teachers' reluctance to divert their attention from classroom to managerial duties;
- Teachers' feelings of competition and tension in multiprogram schools.

It seems reasonable to assume that districts will have a greater chance of getting teachers to support alternatives if their implementation policies take these responses into account.

HOW FAMILIES CHOOSE EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

Unless they could afford private schools, most parents have had virtually no control over the type of education their children receive since universal schooling began in this country. The pertinent question here is why giving them such control now will cure any of the educational system's apparent ills.

Proponents usually argue that increased family choice will yield at least three benefits, which should ultimately also improve student achievement:

- If parents can choose among programs or schools, teachers will have to work harder to attract and retain students;
- Giving parents the right to choose may reduce feelings of alienation and increase their satisfaction with schools;
- Parents may be able to make a better match between programs and their childrens' needs and learning styles.

Opponents argue that parental choice has potential ills of its own. Perhaps the biggest political worry is that it might reinforce racial and social-class segregation. If so, and if we accept the assumption that integrated classrooms give disadvantaged students a better educational chance, it could undercut for some students the aim of improving student achievement.

Our study of parental choice in Alum Rock confirms that families of different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds vary in their involvement with school matters, their criteria for selecting alternative programs, and their satisfaction with the schools. Indeed, one of the study's strongest findings was that different kinds of classrooms attract different kinds of students when parents have free choice, and that children from socially advantaged families tend to be overrepresented in less structured classrooms. Whether these differences will have negative effects on educational equity in the long run, we cannot say; however, our findings suggest a number of things districts can do to ensure that parental choice itself is as equitable as possible.[5]

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[5] The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume IV of the series; see the Preface for a complete listing. These findings are based primarily on Alum Rock survey data, supplemented with

The arguments for and against parental choice are based on certain assumptions. To put forth those arguments without testing those assumptions begs a number of questions:

(1) Do parents have the motivation and competence to make intelligent choices among alternatives? Since that competence partly depends on the information they have, do all parents receive equally complete, accurate information about their alternatives? Do different subpopulations use different sources of information?

(2) Are parents better at placing their children than the schools are? Do they use educational criteria in choosing programs? Do they choose schools on the basis of their long-term goals for their children?

(3) Does parental choice exacerbate or attentuate segregation by race, sex, or social class?

(4) Does the power to make educational choices render parents less alienated and more satisfied with the schools?

Our study showed significant differences in families' awareness of alternatives and sources of information. Initially, socially advantaged families had more, and more accurate, information about alternatives and the rules governing choice than disadvantaged families. Educational background was an especially important factor in this difference. Better educated families relied primarily on printed material, but also

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information from Minneapolis and the school district in Mamaroneck, New York. Family choice was not investigated in Eugene or Cincinnati.

discussed programs with principals, teachers, and parent counselors. Less educated families relied primarily on personal contacts for information, particularly on parent counselors at the schools. Thus, at the outset of the demonstration, socially advantaged families had a better chance of making informed choices. When the rules governing choice of school stayed relatively stable over time, however, the differences between parents' information levels diminished as all parents gained more experience with the choice system.

On the whole, parents used noninstructional criteria in choosing programs. Location was the primary criterion for most families, regardless of background. Even with free transportation, families preferred to send their children to neighborhood schools. (Note, however, that twenty percent of the students at Alum Rock attended non-neighborhood schools.) The more distinctive an alternative program was, however, the less important location became in the parents' decisions. It also became less important the older the child.

When parents used curriculum as a criterion, enrollment patterns show a statistically nonrandom grouping of children by social background. This grouping reflects the childrearing values associated with those backgrounds. Less educated parents tend to attach greater importance to children's politeness and obedience. Better educated, middle-class parents tend to encourage imagination and independence in their children, and therefore find more appeal in less structured classrooms that also encourage those traits. All of the data suggest the same conclusion: When parents can choose between open and traditional classrooms, less advantaged children tend to be found in the

more structured, traditional classrooms, more advantaged children in the less structured, open classrooms. We found this true across sites.

With or without choice, families tend to express more satisfaction with their children's teachers than with the system as a whole. How does having choices affect their satisfaction with the schools? The findings indicate that the more powerless parents feel, the less satisfied they are with the school system and school personnel. Giving them the power to choose their children's programs decreases this alienation, but it does not permanently increase satisfaction. Although parents become more satisfied with the schools at the beginning of an innovation, that satisfaction dwindles when the innovation fails to live up to their (usually inflated) expectations. They become even less satisfied with the schools if constraints are put on their alternatives after a period of having many choices.

These findings lead to some conclusions about what districts could do to make parental choice more informed, more educationally relevant, and more equitable.

We have seen that in a heterogeneous school district, socially disadvantaged families will initially be less informed and thus, at the outset, slightly less likely than socially advantaged families to choose the schools that are most appropriate for their children. Districts can help the less advantaged families understand the system more quickly by keeping it stable, tailoring their strategies for disseminating information to fit the habits and preferences of different subpopulations, and lowering the costs of information gathering for parents. Efforts to provide disadvantaged families with the sources of

information they favor would involve such actions as backing up the printed material sent to everyone with phone calls or personal visits to disadvantaged families. Lowering the cost of information for parents might mean keeping the schools open during evenings or weekends so that hourly workers will not lose wages to learn about choices. These additional efforts mean additional costs. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that districts with a high percentage of disadvantaged families will have to spend more on the information component of a family choice system.

If districts want to encourage families to make educational difference, not location, their primary criterion for choosing among programs, they can offer those choices within, rather than only between, schools. This means housing alternatives in multiprogram, neighborhood schools. As we have seen, however, that kind of organization creates serious problems for principals and teachers. These problems can be so intractable that the human and financial costs of overcoming them may well be prohibitive, especially for poorer districts.

The final, most philosophically demanding, question that districts must face is what, if anything, to do about the de facto social class segregation that may result from parental choice. That is a policy issue that deserves study in its own right. It was not addressed in our study of alternatives.

MEASURING DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Districts offer alternative programs under a variety of labels, but the issue is whether these programs are actually or only nominally

different from one another and from traditional classrooms. If they are different in name only, they cannot accomplish the goal of improving student achievement by meeting the needs of a socially and ethnically diverse student population. The most fundamental question is whether a voucher system or any other system of alternatives can generate real diversity in public education. To answer these questions, educators and policymakers need systematic means of measuring the actual diversity achieved in districts that offer such programs.

Using the demonstration at Alum Rock, Rand developed and tested instruments for making these measurements and applied them to alternative and regular classrooms there. The study began with two basic assumptions: (1) A "traditional" classroom type exists that can be recognized behaviorally and structurally (the teacher talks; the students listen; work is separate from play and is done quietly and uniformly in the student's assigned seat); (2) if there is genuine diversity of choice, it should be visible in structural and behavioral departures from the traditional type. Rand researchers undertook a description of the options that had evolved during the demonstration in order to discover, inductively, the characteristics of learning environments that indicate diversity.[6]

We chose 1975-1976, the fourth year of the demonstration, in order to allow time for the alternative programs to be fully established. The analytic sample for the study included 40 alternative and 34 regular classrooms. The alternative classrooms represented 19 mini-schools

[6] The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume V of the series; see the Preface for a complete listing.

within eight elementary schools; the comparison group of regular classrooms represented nine elementary schools.

The research attempted to discover which classroom characteristics among all those studied generated significantly different educational choices. It was therefore critically important to select initial variables that were relevant and comprehensive enough to yield legitimate responses to that question. We developed the variables from three sources: the mini-schools' self-reports, educational literature, and Rand's pilot studies in Alum Rock. The mini-schools' reports were considered an important potential source of program characteristics because the terms in which they described their educational offerings indicated what they saw as their salient differences. To look at the programs only in those terms, however, might have risked neglecting classroom differences that arose as functions of but not as explicit aims of mini-school program development. Consequently, the research team also consulted the educational literature for other variables that would mark differentiation among classrooms. These variables and those from the pilot studies were examined to see which would be useful for discriminating among Alum Rock classrooms and could be reliably observed.

The variables ultimately selected were used to construct data-collection instruments to be completed by trained observers, and questionnaires to be filled out by the teachers whose classes were observed. For at least two reasons, however, we relied more on observations than on the questionnaires. First, previous studies of educational innovation indicate that if principals and teachers believe

they are participating in novel programs, they accordingly perceive novelty in their own practices, even though classroom observers find few departures from traditional practice. Second, programs are rarely implemented exactly as originally planned. Because the differences may not be apparent to participants, observation is an important instrument for establishing the nature of the alternative as it has evolved.

We used the datasets generated by the observations and questionnaires to construct and interpret a spatial model of the diversity among alternatives. In the model, proximity among units indicates similarity among classrooms, and distance indicates dissimilarity.

This model reveals that for Alum Rock, the alternative system did not generate truly diverse educational alternatives. With the exception of three "outlying" classrooms, the rest of the alternative and all of the regular classrooms cluster around the center of the model. Behaviorally and structurally, then, the alternative classrooms were strikingly similar to each other and to the regular classrooms, despite their intended differences in content or method. They were similar with respect to the number of different locations occupied, the number of tasks occurring simultaneously, the number of different materials in spontaneous use, and the number of different modes of learning/teaching occurring simultaneously in the classrooms.

We would not conclude from these findings, however, that alternative programs cannot generate educational diversity. The study has a number of limitations that would make that generalization irresponsible. Among these is its setting: All classrooms were drawn

from a single district participating in a federally sponsored demonstration that had not been generated by community interests and where there was little formal training of teachers in different models. Thus, this investigation must be regarded as a case study in diversity.

Nevertheless, the results suggest that our approach is a valid one for detecting and portraying variation among educational alternatives. The three outlying classrooms were empirically different, in terms of the variables measured, from the others observed. Further, the self-reports elicited by the questionnaires, for outlying teachers and the rest, were reasonably congruent with the teaching practices they exhibited in our observations. Thus, the model does capture actual diversity.

The demonstration encouraged new approaches and should have provided an excellent opportunity for teachers to try out different methods and contents. Our data cannot explain why only three alternative classrooms were strikingly different in organization and operation. The most reasonable speculation is that these outlying classrooms reflect educational preferences of the individual teachers, preferences not shared by their other colleagues. It may be that these outliers' pre-demonstration classrooms would have exhibited the same characteristics that their alternative classrooms did. It may also be that the decentralized administration introduced by the demonstration allowed them to put their preferences into action. It seems likely, however, that if the demonstration had provided a sharp spur to diversity, we would have found more of it than we did. Evidently, the demonstration in Alum Rock permitted but did not promote an observable diversity of educational alternatives.

HOW ALTERNATIVES AFFECT STUDENT OUTCOMES

Although one set of objectives of educational alternatives comprises improved student achievement, self-concept, and social skills, the way programs are implemented mediates these objectives. Policymakers and districts have assumed that, given the power to choose, parents would make a better match between teaching programs and their children's needs; and that, with parents given greater influence over school decisions, teachers would build better programs. Those changes, they assumed, would improve the educational process, which in turn would improve outcomes. Laudable as these aims are, however, this policy has nothing to say about what educational features a "better" program would have. Rand's purpose in measuring student outcomes in Alum Rock was to look at features of the demonstration as potential determinants of student outcomes in a system of alternatives.[7]

We attempted to answer two broad questions regarding cognitive and noncognitive outcomes of the demonstration: Were student outcomes different in alternative and regular schools? Did perceptions and attitudes of teachers, characteristics of the programs, perceptions of students, and parents' program choices affect student outcomes? We used reading achievement as the cognitive outcome and social, self, and peer perceptions as the noncognitive outcomes.

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[7] This approach seemed especially appropriate because the demonstration could not, for all the reasons we have seen, provide substantial evidence for or against vouchers or for the effects of educational diversity on students. The research summarized in this section is contained in Volume VI of the series; see the Preface for a complete listing.

The demonstration presented a number of problems that affected our analyses of student outcomes, our interpretations, or both. Data on students in regular schools for the first two years of the demonstration were virtually unusable. The student-achievement data available for those years were flawed by test administration problems; and non-cognitive measures were administered only to small, and potentially unrepresentative, subsamples of students. Further, because of the nature of parent and teacher (school) choices, students and classes could not be randomly assigned to regular or alternative schools. Hence, data on student outcomes had to be adjusted statistically for differences in students attending regular and alternative school programs. These adjustments call for caution in interpreting effects. Finally, the alternative programs had been implemented for, at most, three years' time, making any estimate of their effect on outcomes necessarily incomplete. These limitations should be kept in mind in interpreting the findings reported below.

We found no appreciable or consistent differences in students' (adjusted) reading achievement between regular and alternative schools. The results were similar for noncognitive outcomes. Attendance at regular or alternative schools made no appreciable or consistent difference in students' social, self, or peer perceptions.

These results should not be surprising, since the immediate objectives of the Alum Rock demonstration were to decentralize administration and encourage parent participation. Looked at in another way, moreover, the results suggest that experimenting with educational

programs does not necessarily interfere negatively with student outcomes.

Our data and analyses did enable us to identify and examine the effects of certain alternative-school features that may reasonably be expected to influence student achievement. We examined the effects that parental choice, program size, and students' and teachers' perceptions of their alternative schools had on reading achievement. This information may aid other schools in implementing alternatives and improving education.

To test the assumption that parental choice would affect achievement by making a better match between students' needs and the education they receive, we examined the effect of that choice on reading achievement. Because we had no information on whether parents had actively chosen or on what basis they had chosen a particular placement, we used two proxies for that data: students' number of program changes and their non-local school attendance. We found no appreciable or consistent effects on reading achievement for either of these variables. Thus, at least as measured by our proxies, parental choice appears to be unrelated to student achievement.

Because of their smaller size, the mini-school programs might be expected to improve student achievement by encouraging communication among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. We did not have a measure of this communication flow, but we could examine the effect of program size for particular grades during the third and fourth years of the demonstration. The findings suggest that smaller program size leads to slightly higher reading scores: In the third year, there was no

statistically significant relationship between program size and reading achievement; but in the fourth year, smaller size was associated with higher reading achievement.

What of the relationship between students' perceptions of their program and their reading achievement? We measured the effect of students' perceptions of the organization and social environment of their classrooms and the difficulty of their work. We found that as the perceived difficulty of classroom work increased, so did their mean scores on reading achievement. However, students' perceptions about social environment and organization had no appreciable or consistent effects on reading scores.

The effects of teachers' perceptions proved to be the most complex and significant of the features we studied. We examined the effect that several kinds of perceptions had on student achievement at both the classroom level and the mini-school level.

We found that mini-schools whose teachers perceived that the staff was cohesive, that policies were commonly held, and that the principal was involved, had higher reading achievement than mini-schools whose teachers perceived the opposite. This degree of cooperation, cohesiveness, and principal's involvement logically implies less autonomy and influence of individual teachers at the mini-school level. And we found that cohesive mini-schools comprising teachers who, on average, did not perceive themselves as especially autonomous or influential did have higher reading achievement. Mini-schools whose teachers, on average, perceived themselves as having greater autonomy and influence had lower reading achievement.

At the classroom level, however, reading achievement was higher in those classes whose teachers saw themselves as more autonomous and influential than their colleagues, regardless of mini-school affiliation or general reading achievement for the whole program. In other words, regardless of whether these teachers taught in cohesive or noncohesive mini-schools, their classes would be likely to have higher reading achievement.

Two conclusions of this study may prove particularly significant for policymakers, school-district administrators, and teachers interested in educational alternatives. First, experimenting with parental choice, program size, and the nature of programs has no apparent negative effect on students' reading achievement, perceptions of themselves and others, or social skills. This finding encourages further experimentation with alternatives. Second, teachers' perceptions of their alternative-school program and of their autonomy and influence within the program affect student reading achievement. Therefore, program implementation must be carefully planned taking that into account. For a separate-site, alternative school, steps should be taken to promote teachers' perceptions of cohesiveness, shared policy, and principal support. For a multiprogram school in which alternatives will be offered on a teacher/classroom by teacher/classroom basis, selection of individual teachers is important. In addition to the usual selection criteria, teachers should be sought who perceive themselves as more autonomous and influential than their colleagues.

The next section discusses the implications of our conclusions for local and federal policies affecting alternatives.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Major educational innovations, such as education vouchers and systems of alternatives, affect the interests of an extensive constituency. The multiplicity and ambiguity of those interests make it very difficult for policy analysts to reach final conclusions about the desirability of major school reforms. It is all the more difficult with a complex intervention that defies simple judgment, such as that it "works" or "does not work." Ultimately, citizens, professionals, and policymakers must make the value judgments about how desirable diversity and choice may be. We hope that by pointing out the most important policy issues identified by our research, this report will assist local decisionmakers in the difficult task of deciding what educational paths their communities should take in this decade and will aid federal policymakers in facilitating local innovation.

LOCAL POLICIES IN THE INTRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

Our discussion of local district policies does not provide a set of firm guidelines for public schools to follow in establishing a system of alternatives. A detailed plan would be inconsistent with the findings of this research, would be impractical, and would be ignored, for good reason, by practitioners and policymakers. Instead, we first identify the significant issues that policymakers (especially the school board) must address in initiating and implementing alternatives. Then we outline the practical problems of implementation faced by district personnel at all levels.

Major Policy Issues

To survive and maintain its distinctiveness, a system of alternatives must have broad-based support in a district. The larger the proposed system, the greater the support it needs from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other people in the community. The people who will be affected by the system of alternatives must participate in assessing its desirability, feasibility, and possible scope. They must first decide whether a system of alternatives holds promise of solving local school problems. They should also avoid the temptation to adopt alternatives because they are popular, or "innovative," or offer a way to secure outside funding, or anticipate a federal or state mandate. It is highly likely that systems adopted solely for these reasons will waste financial and human resources and, ultimately, fail.

The Requirements of Different Types of Alternative Systems. There are several fundamentally different types of alternative systems. In this research we have identified three: (1) the localized alternatives system involving a small number of programs, students, and staff, in which students choose alternatives only if they wish to opt out of the "regular" program; (2) the comprehensive alternatives system in which there is no longer a "regular" program and families with children in certain grades or certain areas of a district must register a choice among available options; and (3) the desegregation alternatives system (which may be part of a comprehensive system) that is designed to integrate schools by offering attractive educational options.

Each of these has significantly different requirements for staff development, parent information, district administrative organization, facilities, school level administration, cost, etc. Detailed aspects of these differences are described in the section on implementing alternatives below.

Systemwide Implications of Alternatives. As we saw in Section III, even the smallest system of alternatives calls for changes in many aspects of a school district's operation. Implementing and sustaining a comprehensive system of alternatives requires significant change in a number of areas: transportation, personnel, accounting, health services, maintenance, operations, food services, evaluation, instruction, and administration. Staff assignment policies must be adjusted to accommodate the unique needs of different kinds of programs. District-wide curriculum and facilities planning, deployment of auxiliary personnel, and testing programs must take account of the diversity among programs. In short, having alternatives means that fewer programmatic decisions can appropriately be made by the central office and applied in a standard fashion to all schools. Making these changes takes substantial energy and commitment from personnel on all district levels. Without this commitment, programs may thrive initially but then wither.

Formalizing Alternatives. If an alternative system is to survive, the district must formalize its operation. This means creating appropriate high-level administrative units that are responsible for coordinating district functions affecting alternatives. It also means providing the financial and technical support (for curriculum

development, staff training, and proposal writing), facilities, and school-level administration necessary to create and maintain program diversity. Particularly in a "localized" system, the district must, on the one hand, formally legitimize alternatives with school board and administrative authorization and, on the other hand, informally present alternatives so that they are not threatening to other district schools. Systems of alternatives that are not "promoted" in these ways may not only fail in the long run but cause conflict and tension in the district along the way.

The Demands of Alternatives on Personnel. In the attempt to implement alternatives, teachers, particularly, may be overworked. In our judgment, it is essential to recognize the demands that alternatives make on teachers and provide necessary support. Teachers should be given release time and/or extra, paid, workdays to design and update alternative curricula. Mechanisms should be found to relieve them of much of the administrative burden in their schools. Our surveys indicate that once the initial excitement of creating an alternative school has died down, the workload begins to weigh heavily. At this point teachers should be permitted to concentrate primarily on their instructional activities, without having to spend a great deal of time on organizational problems.

In sum, before deciding to initiate alternatives, district leaders should be aware of the burden they will place on school personnel and make plans to offer assistance.

Planning and Phasing-In. Prior to implementation, school districts should map out all the activities necessary for putting the system of

alternatives in place. During the planning period, the district administration should determine what tasks must be performed, identify who will do them, and enlist the support of these people. To the greatest degree possible, the student accounting system, the financial accounting system, the rules of choice, the selection and lottery procedures, and the other "subsystems" of alternatives should be developed prior to the start of the first school year.

Because funds are rarely available for extensive planning activities, it may be necessary in many localities to phase into alternatives gradually, developing the procedures as needed. With this approach, the original development work can be located in schools that have the greatest interest in alternatives and the greatest chances of success. Also, successful examples of alternatives may be the soundest basis for creating more extensive demand and support for them when the goal is a comprehensive system of choice.

Costs and Outside Funding. Alternatives usually have substantial start-up costs, and the recurring costs of the system may equal or exceed the costs of a district's regular program. In general, the larger the system and the greater the diversity of programs, the more costly it will be to change from the existing to the new system. Implementing diversity will incur costs for staff development, administration and planning, curriculum development, facilities, equipment, materials, and other educational resources. Because costs vary significantly with the nature of the programs, we will not attempt to make specific estimates. However, because the costs of diversity can be substantial, districts should analyze them carefully before implementation.

Considering these costs, outside funding is very helpful in starting alternatives but, in our view, it is no substitute for local interest and determination. Innovations undertaken opportunistically--because funds are available--are much less likely to continue when outside funding stops than are innovations adopted as solutions to local problems. For example, Alum Rock saw the voucher demonstration as a means of decentralizing administration. Decentralization has survived the end of federal funding; the alternative system has not.

Reversibility of Alternatives. Having considered the problems of starting alternatives, districts should give some thought to the consequences of ending them. Our research indicates that even after it is dismantled, an alternative system may have lingering effects. Alternatives are supposed to improve consumer satisfaction, but parents become less satisfied with the school system when choices are taken away. Defunct alternatives can leave other vestiges in a district. Even after most of the mini-schools were eliminated in Alum Rock, open enrollment--with transportation--was continued. Thus, the legacy of this system of alternatives that was not originally sought by parents is an open-enrollment system without advertised diversity.

Implementation Issues

The previous discussion focused on general considerations, primarily the concern of the district board of trustees. Now we turn to the practical problems that district and school administrators, teachers, and others face in bringing a proposed system of alternatives

to life. We address first the problems and solutions associated with creating and maintaining diversity, and then turn to the difficulties and opportunities presented by a system of parental choice.

The activities appropriate to developing and administering alternative programs vary somewhat with the scope and purpose of the system.

Developing Alternative Programs. In the localized system, program development seems better left to those who will actually operate the school and to the parents of students who will attend the school. In this situation, the district confines its role to providing a supportive environment in which the alternative(s) can be planned and implemented. Early in the process, the district should provide technical assistance for groups developing alternative proposals. This is particularly important where parents, rather than teachers, are proposing a program.

Because localized alternatives are likely to be staffed by highly committed teachers, district officials do not have the problem of overcoming staff resistance, as they often do with district-initiated innovations. However, teachers' enthusiasm for an alternative approach often outstrips their practical knowledge of how to go about it. Trying to translate this enthusiasm into operational plans becomes a major challenge in implementing alternatives. The district should provide time for planning and curriculum development and opportunities for staff training--especially for method-oriented alternatives.

When the alternatives differ sharply from regular programs, the district may lack support staff who have enough experience with them to offer such training-and-development assistance. Nevertheless, it seems

prudent to have the district provide supervision of staff development activities, rather than simply allocate discretionary funds to the programs for this purpose. For example, a district coordinator could work with the alternative programs to plan the use of outside consultants or visits to similar schools in other districts.

In a district using alternatives for comprehensive change, the much larger scope of the project demands a different, more direct role for district management than a localized effort does. First of all, it must stimulate broader interest and support among teachers. Its alternatives cannot be developed and staffed by the small cadre of highly motivated faculty likely to have introduced innovations themselves; a cross-section of district teachers needs to participate.

To encourage that participation, the district must provide incentives and reduce risks. Increased professional autonomy, access to extra resources, and professional recognition may act as incentives for many teachers, as they did in Minneapolis and Alum Rock. The district can reduce the risks associated with innovation by allowing teachers to help design the programs (and giving release time for these efforts), training them in the required skills, and arranging for support staff to assist with implementation. While both Minneapolis and Alum Rock gave teachers responsibility for designing their programs, Minneapolis provided them with considerably more formal staff development and classroom assistance. We believe that these staff-development-and-assistance activities contributed to the greater success of Minneapolis's alternatives.

In deciding how many kinds of programs to offer, Minneapolis's strategy of developing a small number of alternative models recommends itself on several grounds. It helped create a sense of common purpose throughout the district and made it easier for the district to assist program implementation. District support staff could become "experts" in the different alternatives and, thus, better help teachers implement the programs. Such a focused effort would not have been possible had many different programs been introduced simultaneously.

Districts should also carefully weigh strategies for phasing in comprehensive programs. Although Minneapolis did not originally plan to pilot the alternative models in one small section of the district before disseminating them districtwide, that is evidently an effective strategy for introducing a comprehensive system. No doubt, having federal funds to develop the models (in the SEA project) helped. Nevertheless, even a district proposing to develop systemwide alternatives within its local budget might be wise to consider this strategy of starting small and then expanding.

Districts proposing "magnet" schools to reduce segregation should do careful "market" research into the program preferences of families of different backgrounds. If these preferences differ somewhat by racial group, a combination of community-education campaigns and individualized counseling might help bring choices within the ratios needed to accomplish racial balance.

In selecting program "themes," districts should keep their implications for cost and staff development in mind. Programs that offer special curricula--such as elementary bilingual, performing arts,

or computer science--would probably need extra money for specialized staff and equipment. However, because they involve innovations only in specific parts of the curriculum, they would probably be somewhat easier to implement than more comprehensive, method-oriented alternatives that require extensive training for teachers. Magnet schools can also be developed that are based on neither curricula nor method innovations, but simply offer "higher-quality" standard programs--e.g., by decreasing class size.

In a system of magnet schools, a salient question is who should decide which programs to offer? Most of the ideas for Cincinnati's programs originated in the central office. This pattern of program initiation probably resulted from the district's estimate of the desegregating potential various programs had at particular sites and its determination to establish a large number of alternatives quickly.

We do not believe that this top-down approach is necessary for initiating a system of magnet schools. Cincinnati itself adopted a different approach after meeting resistance to some alternatives it imposed on schools. In its revised approach, the district enlists school-level personnel and community members early in the deliberations on program design. This strategy not only broadens staff commitment and community support, but also reveals the likely popularity of different programs. Certain schools are designated potential magnet sites, and the district works with their staffs and communities to develop program proposals, retaining final authority for actually establishing the program at that site. This kind of participatory planning seems to require more generous lead time than the top-down approach.

Districts should provide various kinds of support in implementing magnet schools. Staff-development needs vary with the type of program undertaken. Hiring and transfer procedures should be adjusted to allow magnet schools to acquire the teachers who are best suited to their special program needs. Curriculum development should be handled either by assigning special resource personnel to do the job or by allowing teachers release time for planning.

The Administration of Diversity. District policymakers should carefully consider the tradeoffs between implementing separate-site alternative programs and placing the programs with other alternatives or with a regular program in a multiprogram school.

Perhaps the most complex problem in a system of alternatives is managing multiprogram schools. We have found that teachers perceive more tension and conflict in multiprogram sites than in separate-site alternatives. Our findings also suggest that an alternative has a better chance of offering a distinctive educational program if it is organized as a separate-site rather than as a multiprogram alternative. However, important considerations may induce a school district to provide alternatives in a multiprogram school: Parents may demand choice within neighborhood schools; limited demand for certain kinds of alternatives may make it hard to fill a school building; limited funding may prevent the district from building new facilities. Should these forces require the use of multiprogram schools, our findings suggest means of mitigating their disadvantages:

- District management should take steps to ensure that the host school is receptive to an alternative program before placing it

at the school, trying to minimize discrepancies in educational philosophy and style between the alternative and its host school.

- o District management should select principals specifically for a multiprogram-building assignment or provide multiprogram principals with training to enable them to cope with this new form of school organization. "Administrative" and "facilitative" management styles seem to be more effective than "authoritarian" approaches in multiprogram buildings.

Leadership is also important in operating separate-site alternatives. District management should make certain that substantive program leadership is available at those sites. This leadership can be provided by either the school principal, a head teacher, or a group of teachers who are given decisionmaking authority. We found that program distinctiveness and program leadership were strongly associated in separate-site alternatives.

A second important problem, most often found in a localized system of alternatives, is the overall relationship between the district and the alternative programs. Because an alternative may be out of the mainstream of the district's educational activities, administrators may be tempted to let it sink or swim. They may take the attitude that if its staff can make a program work, fine; if not, the program can simply go out of business. At the other extreme, nervous administrators may monitor alternatives overzealously, preventing them from becoming genuinely distinct options. Districts must find the appropriate balance between autonomy, experimentation, and risk-taking on the alternative's

part and the district's ultimate responsibility for program quality and equity.

A persistent question is likely to be: Which district regulations apply to the alternative programs and which do not? On the basis of their alternative status, these programs may seek exemption from established district procedures for staff hiring, budgeting, attendance, field trips, evaluation, facilities use, scheduling, etc. Where these procedures undercut a program's distinctiveness, an important--and inexpensive--way for a district to provide support is through waivers and administrative flexibility. This solution may create other problems, however. For example, regular schools may question the equity of these arrangements (as might teachers' unions). If so, the district may have to contend with more far-reaching change than it originally intended.

Budget information is our final topic under the administration of alternatives. Normally, decisionmaking is substantially decentralized in a system of alternatives. Schools, mini-schools, and the various other instructional units decide how discretionary funds will be spent. Individual teachers, groups of teachers, and principals purchase related services (such as psychological services), aides, equipment, materials, and other items needed in their programs. To make these decisions efficiently, they need timely and accurate budget records. This recordkeeping becomes complicated when schools are funded from multiple income sources, purchase prices are different from list prices, orders are returned unfilled, and the volume of transactions becomes large. In these cases, a computerized, school-level, accounting system is

essential. The system should produce simple, up-to-date information on how much has been spent for what and how much remains. Without these records, considerable funds may go unspent and needed resources may not reach the classroom in a timely fashion.

Implementing Consumer Choice. In a system of alternatives, families choose the school or program that a student will attend. Alternatives may differ in content, instructional methods, and instructional materials and equipment. They will differ in teachers, locations, facilities, and kinds of student population. Thus, whether or not schools are pedagogically different, there will be important differences among them and important choices to be made.

Consumers need two types of information in a system of alternatives: information about the rules and procedures of choice and information about programs.

Because the rules of choice tend to become complex, making parents adequately aware of them is a problem. At least during the first year or two, socially disadvantaged families may be less informed than more educated families about these rules. Our data suggest that districts can address this imbalance by using multiple means of communication and tailoring their publicity programs to the communication channels that various segments of the population favor. Concerning substantive information about programs, the district should ensure that "official" information is comparable among schools. It should also emphasize that certain conclusions about the relative effectiveness of programs (e.g., in improving performance on standardized achievement tests) may not be warranted, based on the available information.

This raises the general issue of who should provide information: each school for itself, or a central administrative unit that ensures comparability of information? When counselors provide parents with information about rules of choice and the differences among schools, school staffs regard the counselors as advocates instead of neutral purveyors. Possible alternatives to having each counselor speak for all schools include having counselors represent individual schools or groups of similar schools. Parents could then talk to a counselor from each of the schools (or groups of schools) that interest them. However, there is the danger that individual-school counselors could begin to "sell" rather than speak for their schools.

In the districts included in this study, most of the formal information provided to parents was distributed by a central administrative unit operating independently of individual schools. In general, the larger the system of alternatives, the greater the need for an extensive, centralized information system. In a small "localized" program of alternatives--which tends to involve unusually active and informed parents and students--much less extensive procedures are needed.

Avoiding Segregation. In a system that offers choice, it may be difficult to keep certain types of segregation from increasing. Our research provided consistent evidence that families of lower socioeconomic-status (SES) disproportionately select "traditional" schools, while higher SES families disproportionately select "open" programs. School districts that wish to avoid this kind of "sorting out" might experiment with information campaigns and other mechanisms.

To our knowledge, the districts we studied were not aware of this situation and took no actions to correct it.

A system of alternatives that is specifically designed to promote desegregation creates special public-relations problems. The district must sell programs to the public and recruit students. Beyond general publicizing of the "magnet" schools, district officials may have to carry out targeted recruiting campaigns to attract enough students of each background for a given program.

Consumer Sovereignty Versus Program Stability. At all our research sites, we found a conflict between the ideals of consumer choice and program stability. Some advocates of choice argue that parents should be allowed to transfer their children between schools at any time during the year. Teachers and principals object that such a practice disrupts the curriculum and makes it difficult to plan for the acquisition of personnel and materials (such as textbooks). Conflict also occurs between those who contend that all students should be allowed to enroll in their first-choice program and school personnel who argue that limits are essential to preserve the quality and integrity of programs. Teachers claim that expansion is difficult because appropriate personnel, facilities, and equipment are frequently not available and integrating new personnel into a program may be disruptive. Further, they contend that the number of students is often an important eductional feature of the program.

The districts we studied adopted rules that tended to promote the program stability teachers wanted. Most transfers could occur only between school years or semesters (as at the college level), and program

staffs were permitted to regulate total enrollment. Parents and others did not offer heated opposition to these solutions. In the case of siblings, however, program stability took a back seat. In Alum Rock, for example, brothers and sisters were automatically enrolled in the same program if their parents insisted.

Cost of Choice. Compared with the total cost of operating an educational system, the costs of implementing parent choice are small. Nevertheless, they are not inconsequential. In general, they will vary with the size of the system of alternatives, the complexity of information parents need, the characteristics of the community (communicating with lower SES families costs more), and other factors. Depending on the size of the alternative system, transportation may be the largest additional cost. Districts have the option, of course, not to provide transportation, as was the case in Eugene. However, this greatly limits the number of actual choices available to parents. Other costs include collection of information about schools, analysis of these data, and preparation and publication of pamphlets and other descriptive materials. The district may also face costs for advertising, printing, computer processing of parent selections, mailings to parents, and counselor salaries. A portion of administrative overhead should also be charged to the process of choice.

Summary

Our discussion of local policies in the introduction and management of alternatives has had three major themes:

First, before setting out to create alternative schools, district officials and community leaders should fully evaluate the need for alternatives. They should not rush to implement this innovation; instead, they should take the time required to weigh its many potential benefits and costs.

Second, creating educational diversity and establishing parental choice will generate a heavy new workload for teachers and administrators and may stimulate controversy and criticism. Alternatives will require administrators and teachers to make decisions concerning:

- Distribution of decisionmaking authority,
- Allocation of money, facilities, and personnel,
- Curriculum content,
- In-service training,
- Possible racial and social segregation,
- Rules for admission and transfer,
- Publication of school-performance information,
- Competition for students, and
- Applicability of district rules to alternatives.

Although district personnel will find similar school districts' experience helpful in facing these issues, they will have to devise unique solutions, for the most part.

Third, if alternatives are to be more than another short-lived "project," the district will have to take formal steps to embody the new system in its routine operation. The mechanisms for doing this include

regular channels of communication with the board of trustees, administrative offices, rules of resource allocation, and other standard operating procedures.

THE FEDERAL ROLE IN CREATING EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY AND CHOICE

For federal policy, the most salient conclusion of this research is that local interests dominate the complex political and bureaucratic process of implementing alternatives. The failure of federal initiatives in Alum Rock, the successful district expansion of a federal project in Minneapolis, and the successful creation of alternative programs in Cincinnati and Eugene, without federal involvement, indicate that federal leadership is neither essential nor sufficient to establish diversity and choice in local public education.

The Alum Rock 'Voucher' Demonstration--A Lesson in the Limits of Federal Leadership

The Alum Rock experience illustrates that large sums of federal money, even if combined with substantial academic and technical expertise, are insufficient to overcome firmly entrenched local interests. The demands of parents, teachers, principals, and district administrators in Alum Rock forced compromises in the OEO voucher model that limited consumer sovereignty and protected traditional interests and roles. While Alum Rock does not provide direct evidence, it seems likely that implementing the federal voucher model would have required the dissolution of Alum Rock as a single organization, would have caused many teachers and administrators to lose their jobs, and would have injected tension and uncertainty into the classroom. There should be

little surprise that in Alum Rock such a threatening voucher model was seriously compromised and that educational vouchers have been rejected by educators across the United States.

The issue for federal policy at this time is not whether vouchers should be advocated and tested but whether they can be implemented at all and, if so, how. The Alum Rock experience indicates that it would be extremely difficult to work through an existing public school district to establish a system of competing schools. Unless administrators, teachers, and parents are largely in favor of breaking up the local education agency (LEA) and creating financially independent and competing schools, we believe it would be unwise for the federal government to attempt again to contract with an LEA for a voucher demonstration. Another demonstration controlled by an LEA would almost certainly produce another parody of a free-market educational system of the type originally proposed by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1971.

The Minimal Federal Role in Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Eugene

As Alum Rock is a good example of the limits of federal leadership, the other three sites in this research are good examples of the ability of communities to change without federal assistance or direction. Eugene and Cincinnati implemented modest systems of alternatives in pursuit of local goals--nontraditional schooling opportunities in the first case and desegregation in the second--and the federal government was not involved. Minneapolis started alternatives in a corner of the district in response to local demands for "open" education. Although

this project was heavily funded by the federal government (Experimental Schools Program), dissemination of its instructional programs to many of Minneapolis's other elementary schools was done without federal help.[1]

An element common to the success of alternatives during the period under study in all three sites was broad support for alternatives as solutions to recognized problems. Parents, teachers, and administrators in Eugene, Cincinnati, and Minneapolis supported the systems of alternatives being implemented in their districts and viewed them as making a substantial contribution to the quality of local education. In Alum Rock, in contrast, alternatives were established in part by political compromise and in part by teacher initiative, to provide opportunities for choice in a "voucher" demonstration. Created without any underlying demand for them, it is not surprising that alternatives were phased out in Alum Rock with the end of federal funding.

Toward a Federal Role in Supporting Organizational Change in Local Education Agencies

Federal policy has typically focused on providing incentives for the adoption of an innovation--a new curriculum package, a new personnel role, and so forth. And that is why federal initiatives have so often proved disappointing. They have been mistaken in their expectation that an adopting agency can easily reproduce an organizational innovation. It is much more difficult to adopt an organizational innovation than it is to adopt, say, an innovative hardware technology: The process of

[1] We should not, however, underestimate the important role played by federal "soft money" in providing opportunities for districts to safely start and insulate a controversial program until it proves widely attractive.

"adaptation," through which an agency responds to an innovation, alters and actually redefines the innovation. Consequently, federal incentives have been largely irrelevant in the evolution of organizational and educational practices.

Nevertheless, we are not so pessimistic about the federal government's opportunities for promoting beneficial innovation as the discussion to this point may suggest. We have documented some serious constraints on the federal government that must be acknowledged, but the challenge for federal policymakers is to use the leverage and the unique knowledge possessed by those who have a national perspective.

Our fundamental proposition is that one appropriate role (though not the only one) for the federal government is to assist LEAs in identifying their problems and finding satisfactory solutions. Such federal involvement is not limited to alternatives. The fact that other types of innovations seem to evoke school district behavior similar to that observed in implementing alternatives, suggests a basic federal role appropriate for a wide range of organizational innovations.[2]

In this role, the government would not inform LEAs what their problems are nor promulgate solutions to problems that may or may not exist. Rather, it would:

- o. Assist LEAs in evaluating possible solutions to their problems through dissemination of knowledge (using reports, consultants, conferences, practitioner field trips, and other methods) and

[2] Paul Berman and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. VIII: Implementing and Sustaining Innovations, The Rand Corporation, R-1589/8-HEW, May 1978.

allocation of funds for planning; and

- o. Assist LEAs in implementing possible solutions through dissemination of knowledge and allocation of funds for implementation.

Evaluating Solutions. The task of the federal government is not to sell a detailed model--as it tried to do in Alum Rock--but to assist LEAs in evaluating possible solutions to their problems--as it did in Minneapolis. Evaluation is the process of identifying innovations that address problems perceived as important by people in the district. Such innovations are likely to capture broad-based support.

In examining innovations, the following questions should be asked:

(1) Is the district considering this innovation merely for the sake of innovation, or does it really have the potential to solve district problems? An innovation's popularity, its potential for prestige or publicity, or its promise of excitement may not be an adequate reason for trying it, particularly if the implementation effort will distract people from other important activities and may actually impede improvements that are in progress.

(2) Is the district considering this innovation in order to accomplish short-term goals or long-term objectives? In Alum Rock, the short-term objective of obtaining more money dominated the district's decision to become the "voucher" demonstration site. As the outcomes there imply, in general, innovations designed to accomplish short-term objectives may prove wasteful in the long term.

(3) Is the district prepared to set up the institutional arrangements necessary to sustain an innovation and integrate it into

the overall program (e.g., formal funding procedures, creation of administrative positions, and establishment of offices to perform support functions)?

(4) Does district administration have a hidden agenda, that is, does it use one reason to gain support for an innovation while the real reason is something else? How will this affect implementation of the innovation?

(5) If this is a major organizational innovation, does the staff understand that it will have systemwide effects, what they might be, and that solutions to implementation problems will cost time and money?

To help LEAs address these questions, the federal government can provide information and planning grants. The federal government's role in disseminating educational information is well established. In this particular application, it would continue that activity as before, but pay special attention to school districts that are receiving planning grants. These planning grants should cover a period of about one year to give districts time to evaluate how desirable and feasible specific organizational innovations would be for them and to determine the detailed steps necessary to implement the innovation.

Implementing Solutions. The federal role in implementing solutions involves selecting districts that will be financially assisted, providing funds, and assisting in the management of change.

The objective in this role is not to find educational practices that work and that can be exported. Districts that participate in this federal-local relationship should not be viewed as experimental sites, demonstration sites, lighthouse districts, or pilot districts. The

proposed relationship is based on a view of organizational development that is different from the traditional "demonstration-dissemination" model. We believe that school districts are ultimately responsible for their own performance and that they are capable of improving it. Nevertheless, outside assistance is often very important.

Implementation grants should be awarded to districts that seem to know what they are trying to accomplish, that have realistically assessed the proposed solution to their problems, that are aware of the pitfalls, and that are prepared to devote the resources and energy necessary to make the innovation work. In other words, in the planning stage, they must have addressed the questions posed above. (A planning grant would not, of course, be a prerequisite for an implementation grant.)[3]

Whether implementation funds are used for a district-devised "pilot" program (such as Southeast Alternatives) or a full-scale version of the innovation, the implementation funds should be allocated with as few strings as possible. The federal investment is secured not by federal control, but by ensuring that the districts selected to receive

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[3] The ESEA Title IV program (previously Title III) is similar to the role described here in that funds for innovation are awarded on a competitive basis to districts that propose worthwhile projects. However, there are some important differences. First, Title IV is basically a state program in that most funding decisions are made by state departments of education; the emphasis here is on a federal role (though, as noted before, these suggestions are applicable to state departments as well). Second, in this funding approach, our emphasis is on ensuring that an extensive planning process occurs in the LEA prior to implementation; in most Title IV projects there has not been a similar emphasis. And third, the selection of projects would not depend on the applicability or exportability of the innovation to other sites. In contrast, statewide needs-assessments have often been important in determining which Title IV projects to fund.

funding have gone through an honest and complete planning process of the type envisioned here.

"Risk capital" has been practically nonexistent in many public school systems the past few years. In states where school district funding is linked to enrollment, declining enrollments have caused critical financial conditions.[4] In these cases, external funding can be an essential ingredient for the trial and success of an organizational innovation. Ample funding for several years may embolden many districts that otherwise would continue in the old ways. Again, the federal government's role is to assist the local process, not to demonstrate solutions that it will eventually try to sell elsewhere.

Finally, the federal role includes assisting districts in managing the implementation process. While management is primarily a local activity, the national government is in a good position to provide information to help districts solve the numerous unforeseen problems that will arise in the course of implementation. This assistance can be provided to districts that are receiving implementation grants and to others that are funding innovations themselves.

Summary

The nature of organizational innovation in LEAs implies a limited role in this field for the federal government. Even so, the Department of Education can inspire innovation by providing seed money to LEAs that are committed to change and improvement. In allocating funds for

[4] Declining enrollment, however, offers an outstanding opportunity for alternatives: It opens up classroom space and schools where alternatives can be housed.

large-scale change, the federal government should select school districts that have carefully analyzed their needs, that have examined a variety of solutions to their problems, and that are willing to mobilize the essential human resources.